



Stuttering

Overview

Stuttering — also called stammering or childhood-onset fluency disorder — is a speech disorder that involves significant problems with normal fluency and flow of speech. Stuttering presents a wide variety of both visible and hidden symptoms. People who stutter know what they want to say, but have difficulty saying it. For example, they may repeat or prolong a word, a syllable, or a consonant or vowel sound. Or they may pause during speech because they've reached a problematic word or sound. A person who stutters may also exhibit other behaviors such as facial grimaces, rapid eye blinks, and unusual body postures or movements. Stuttering can make it difficult to communicate with other people, which often affect a person's quality of life.

Normal Dysfluency vs. Stuttering

Most children go through a normal stage of dysfluency as they begin to put sounds, words, and sentences together. Normal dysfluency is characterized by behaviors such as hesitations, word repetitions, and re-starts. Although the child appears to be stuttering he/she differs from a person who stutters in the severity and pattern of his/her speech dysfluencies. Children who stutter mildly may show the same sound

and word repetitions as children with normal dysfluency but may have a higher frequency of repetitions overall as well as more repetitions each time.

Causes

Researchers continue to study the underlying causes of stuttering. A combination of factors may be involved. Possible causes of stuttering include:

- Abnormalities in speech motor control - Some evidence indicates that abnormalities in speech motor control, such as timing, sensory, and motor coordination, may be involved.
- Genetics - Stuttering tends to run in families. It appears that stuttering can result from inherited (genetic) abnormalities.
- Inadequate breath support
- Neurological disruption - Speech fluency can be disrupted from causes other than developmental stuttering. A stroke, traumatic brain injury, or other brain disorders can cause speech that is slow or has pauses or repeated sounds (neurogenic stuttering)
- Emotional distress - Speech fluency can also be disrupted in the context of emotional distress. Speakers who do not stutter may experience dysfluency when they are nervous or feel pressured. These situations may also cause speakers who stutter to be less fluent.

Symptoms

Stuttering signs and symptoms may include:

- Difficulty starting a word, phrase, or sentence
- Prolonging a word or sounds within a word
- Repetition of a sound, syllable, or word
- Brief silence for certain syllables or words, or pauses within a word (broken word)
- Addition of extra words such as "um" if difficulty moving to the next word is anticipated
- Excess tension, tightness, or facial grimacing
- Anxiety about talking
- Limited ability to effectively communicate



The speech difficulties of stuttering may be accompanied by:

- Rapid eye blinks
- Tremors of the lips or jaw
- Facial tics
- Head jerks
- Clenching fists

Basic Facts about Stuttering

- There are no differences in intelligence between people who stutter and those who do not.
- There are more males than females who stutter; a 3:1 ratio.
- Stuttering affects people from all levels of the socio-economic scale and is found in all parts of the world.
- Children do not copy stuttering. You cannot pick it up by copying someone who stutters.
- Stress and anxiety may aggravate stuttering.
- There are no magical, quick cures for stuttering.
- Research has demonstrated that stuttering can be controlled by direct therapy and environmental changes.

When Should I Seek Help?

- When you are concerned
- your child is very sensitive to the way he or she speaks and is starting to avoid speaking situations
- you notice an interruption of breathing as the child speaks (e.g., the child runs out of breath in the middle of a word)
- Experiencing an increase in the frequency of stuttering
- Facial grimacing (blinking eyes, strain facial expression, nodding head, abnormal mouth movement, etc)
- Getting “stuck” on one sound (e.g. r-r-r-r-rat or m-m-m-m-milk).

General Tips for the Listener

- Listen to **WHAT** they are saying not **HOW** they are saying it.
- Listen patiently: Do **NOT** finish what they are saying.
- Do **NOT** suggest they slow down or start over.
- Attempt to offer a model by talking slowly and quietly whenever possible.
- Attempt to create a relaxed communicative environment.
- Do **NOT** interrupt. But, ask for clarification if the message is not understood.



Early detection is vital!

Children and adults who stutter may benefit from speech therapy. If you suspect a problem consult a Speech-Language Pathologist.



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